

[J. P. Benard]

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[Folkstuff - Rangelore?]

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist.#7

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[FEC?]

J.P. [Benard?], 65, living at 501 Lipscomb St., Fort Worth, Tex., was born Jan. 10, 1873, in one of the two log cabins his father built on a section of land he settled in 1869. These two cabins are still standing and are on the same site, 18 miles west of Weatherford, Parker co., Tex., and on the [Brazos] River Front. Benard's father sold the farm in 1877, to move eight miles west where he established a stock farm. Benard learned to ride horses and do cowboy work on this place before his father sold it and the 1,500 head of cattle he had accumulated, to the Hill Bros., who operated a ranch in Parker co. He then moved the family to a section a few miles south of [Gordon?], in Erath co., and established another stock farm. Later, he established a saloon in Gordon. Six years later, Benard's father died, and he married Rachel Rexroat seven months later. Immediately following his marriage, he left the range to stay. His story:

"I was born Jan. 20, 1873, in a log cabin, and on an unfenced range. Yes sir, [there?] wasn't a fence to be seen in the whole country where it's all fenced up now; and, if a man wants to go some place, he has to follow a road and go in a round about direction to reach the place he's aiming for. The log cabin I was born in was one of the only two

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houses in that part of the country when they were first built. My dad and [grand-dad?] came from Jamestown, Ky., in '69, and built these two places, besides digging an 80 foot well. Both the cabins and the well can still be seen on the original spot, about 18 miles west of Weatherford, Tex., and not 15 feet from the Brazos River. This first place was a 160 acre tract my dad filed on when he first came, but he moved on up on the Kickapoo Creek when I was about four years old.

"[My?] first recollections are about the place on the Kickapoo, and, are about an Indian raid and fight. My mother and I were out 2 penning a few milk cows when she noticed them getting awful skittish, jumping around and flapping their [ears?]. My mother had heard a lot of things about Indians and knew that they used to come down in that part of the country, but they hadn't been down there for years. She decided not to take any chances and sent me on to the house with my little old dog, while she finished the penning. I ran on, and by the time I reached the house she had caught up with me and went in with me. She slammed the door just as we heard running hosses coming our way. She then put a peg under the door, so's it couldn't be shoved in without a little trouble, and got her cap and bail rifle off the wall. After getting it in her arms, she took to watching out of one of the peep holes, which I'd already been doing, and we both saw five Indians ride by on their hosses, just whooping it up. They never even slowed down.

"Along a bout dusk, a couple of hours after the Indians had gone by, dad came in from Weatherford, where he'd been on business. He told us that if it hadn't of been for us closing the door and shutting the window, then redskins would have scalped us, because he'd heard they'd already raided several places to the south of us and carried off hosses. He figured that because there were only five of them, and no extra hosses with them, that there were more of them somewhere else.

"Late that night, after we'd gone to bed, a man knocked on the door and called dad's name. When dad got to the door, he asked who it was, and the man told his name. He was a family friend, and by all that's holy I ought to be able to tell you his name 3 as soon's I

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could tell my own , but I just can't do it. Well, he told dad that those Indians had carried off his racer, a Black Kentuckian, and he deputized dad to help him catch the rascals. They decided to leave a couple of hours before daybreak, and then went to bed. I was asleep when they left, but dad told me all about the fight any number of times afterwards.

“Dad said the Indians were camped at Turkey Roast on [Lost?] Creek, about six miles from our place. They got there just after the Indians had finished eating their breakfast and were getting up in a hurry. Dad said he believed they heard him coming and were trying to get away, because the youngest one of them, a lad of about 18, was already on the black racer when dad and his friend sighted them.

“The hosses were at the river's edge, drinking, when dad and his friend opened fire. His friend's first shot got the young fellow, and he fell off into the creek, where he's been ever since, because nobody ever took him out after that. Two of the others managed to get on their hosses and got away, but the other two fought back. Dad told me that over 24 arrows fell around him while he was shooting at them redskins, and not one of them ever even skunt him. He himself killed the two who stayed to fight, and after he'd got the last one, he and his friend just drug them together and made a crisscross of their bodies, then rode off after the two who got away. They got blood alright, for they saw it on the ground for about two miles, then they lost the trail some sort of way. That was the last Indian fight and raid in 4 Parker county that I ever heard of.

“A sort of a humorous thing happened a couple of years later. Dad made a stock farm out of the place on the Kickapoo, and by hard work and making and selling moonshine likker, he managed to get a sizeable herd of cow critters together and had to hire some cowboys to help handle the work. He hired old George Brown, a fellow named Gable and another by the name of Moore. Moore and Gable were seasoned cowpunchers, as tough as they came, and really knew their cows. They always carried whips on their saddles, and used them on the cattle when needed. Dad noticed that they had bone-handle whips, and he stopped to examine one of them one day. You can imagine his surprise when he found

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that those handles were human bones! It finally came out that Moore and Gable had found where the Indians had been piled, and had picked themselves out some god whip handles. The upshot of it was that dad went over there himself and got a good bone for a whip for himself. I kept his and Gable's whip around with me for years after dad died, but one of my roomers swiped them when he moved away in the middle of the night, and owing me a couple of months rent besides.

“Gable was sure good to me. He was a regular hoss buster and hunted wild hosses in the woods all the time, or wherever he could find traces of them. That was one of the main reasons dad hired him, because he needed hossed to work the cattle; and if he didn't get a man who could bring them in, he'd have to buy up his hosses from some ranch. Old Gable taught me to ride. He'd hold me on a hoss 'til I got the knack of staying in the 5 saddle, then he let me go. He was the one who got dad to buy me a little old pony and a light lasso. While he also taught me the business of roping things, he couldn't get dad to change his mind about roping anything heavier than I was 'til I was a lot older. That was because if I didn't really know my onions and how to use my hoss to help me hold cow critters, they'd drag me off and maybe turn on me and stomp me. Of course, he was right, but it sure grated my soul not to be able to go out there and do like the rest of the cowpunchers. I did do the rest of the work, like riding herd, standing night watch, tending the irons when we were branding, and other jobs. Dad's iron was the 'Circle OU', and made like this: . I never knew just how many head he had at anyone time 'til he sold out later on. He was always adding to his herd, and then driving cattle to Fort Worth or Red River, where they were shipped. When he drove to Red River, they were always shipped to Oklahoma City. I don't know where they went when he drove to Fort Forth.

“After I got to be 11 years old, dad said I could go to roping calves and yearlings. He was awful careful with me, on account of Gable's [accident?], and always telling me I'd end up like Gable did. I reckon I was about eight when Gable had his hard luck. He roped a yearling, and his hoss reared at something right when it should have pegged; that is, sat down. Instead, he reared and throwed Gable off. That wouldn't have been so bad, but he

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hit a stump and the stump broke some ribs. These ribs pressed on his heart, some way or other,, and he didn't live but a few hours after he was thrown. He's have been 6 killed right off if it hadn't of been for a nigger cowpuncher working for Jim Hart, who ran a ranch right next to ours, saw him get pitched off and helped him. The nigger told us that he saw the hoss pitch him off, then drag him around a clump of cedars. Gable's foot was caught in the stirrup. The nigger reached him after the hoss had took him around twice. We buried him in our front yard, alongside my grand-dad, who had died a year or so before. We had to because we didn't know where to send his body. He never got no mail, never went to town, was always out of sight when strangers came to the place, and never told anything about his past life. That looks like a perfect build-up for a man on the dodge, but I don't guess I'll ever know now.

"I do know this, though, Old Gable was better to me then my own parents, and acted like a dad to me at all times. He let me hang around when he was busting wild ones, and taught me the tricks of the trade to where I could stay with a pretty salty bronc before I was 12 years old. Another thing, he taught me to shoot straight and fast, too. He could whip out a sixer faster than any other man I ever saw. I'm including those whom I've seen in shows and other places, like circuses, and so on. He was a natural when it came to handling guns.

"Before I was 12, I was also able to rope some pretty tough critters, my first being a little old spotted yearling. I roped him in front of my dad, and showed him that I had what it took to handle them. He cautioned me to be careful, but go ahead and work like the rest of the boys done.

"By the time I was 13, I was riding the wild ones with every 7 bit the ability Gable showed, and I was never thrown but twice in my life. The first time was after I'd gentled one, and had rode him up to the gate to the house yard. I was just fixing to get down and open the gate when Brown rode up behind me to go in at the same time. His hoss shied at

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something or other, and my hoss just went right straight up. Well, I wasn't fixed and I came off. Brown caught him and turned him into the house lot.

'The next time like to have turned out bad for me because he was a killer. Dad was helping me snub, and after he turned the hoss loose and got out of the way, I jerked the blind and away we went. I stayed right with him, though, 'til he tried a certain jump with a twist I'd never seen before and wasn't expecting. That throwed me, and the hoss turned around to stomp me. I was flat on my stomach with the wind knocked out of me, and the hoss could have easily stomped me flatter'n a hot cake if dad hadn't of shot him.

"Those two hosses were the only two that ever throwed me, but I had one to stumble with me one time, and I sure like to have been branded for the eternal range. [?!] buy that was close! I reckon I had just turned 14 when dad had his men roundup his cattle and add the sale cattle to the herd he'd just bought from the other ranches roundabout. We done that, and drove 1,500 head of mixed, two to four-years-olds to Fort Worth.

"We parked the herd on the hillside, just east of Hemphill St. That was done in the day when there wasn't a house there, and there wasn't even a street out that way. There'd been a lot of water fell just before this, and the whole flat from where the street is to the railroad tracks was under water. There was even 8 a few inches of water over the tracks. Well, we had to wait for the water to go down and the railroad company to get us some cattle cars before we could load them at the little old shipping point the T.P. had at the east end of the old depot. The day after we parked the herd, there come the gosh-awfullest rain and thunderstorm I guess I ever saw. And lightning! There were just big streaks of it and it looked to us like every streak hit the earth and struck something. I don't recall whether it did now or not, but on real bad flash set the herd a-going. It was already skittish as the very mischief, and just waiting for something to run from. All of a sudden, they started, and ran towards the water in the flat. They were going to try and get on the other [side?].

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"I'd been in a number of stampedes before, and had seen how the stopping was done, so when I happened to be closest to the water, I was the only one in a position to reach the leaders and try to turn them into a mill. I rode my hoss right out there like a veteran, and did get in front of the leaders, but just when I got where I could do the most good, my hoss stumbled! Now, I'll tell you that there's far better places to be than in front of a stampeding herd that wouldn't think nothing of stomping you right into the ground, especially if your foot was hung in the stirrup like mine was.

"The hoss fell on his side and my foot was caught. The only saving part about it was that I was on the far side from the herd, and the leaders couldn't keep from seeing the hoss fall. I don't know how come them to do it, but they split around the 9 hoss which was trying to get back up, and the rest of the herd kept splitting the same way 'til the last critter passed by. By the time the stragglers passed, my hoss was back up, I was in the saddle, and we were riding towards the main herd. I'd heard some shots while I was in that mess, and it was one of the cowpunchers dad had hired extra to help drive the herd to Fort Worth. He shot over four of the leaders, and turned the herd into a mill right at the water's edge. Right in the nickle of time, I'd say.

"The other bad stampede we had, the boys didn't even try to stop it, and I didn't either. Instead, I jerked my saddle off and held it over my head. I'll tell you why. We had a little over 500 head on those same flats I was telling you about, and there came up of those sudden ['Northers?'] Texas is noted for. Well, there was a big draw down there this side of the tracks, and we got in there to start a fire. Pretty soon, there came some hailstones down, [bigger'n?] any I've ever seen, before and since. Them stones were so big, they killed about 75 head out of the herd. You see, cattle turn their backs to any wind, or rather, their tails, and their soft spot is up just behind their horns and ears. That's where you slug one when you kill it. These stones would hit there, and the critter would drop. [Seem's?] it sort of lightened up, the whole shebang stampeded south. I reckon it took us over 15 hours to round the herd up again and straighten it out.

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"I talk to these here boys in the neighborhood sometimes, and they just can't hardly believe that the ground they live over was once a holding ground for cattle that came into Fort Worth for shipment. Why, I can pick out of places where I 10 threw my flop and slept, and today, there's houses on pieces of ground too small for even a hoss corral, that are worth more than whole ranches used to cost. I never have stopped wondering at the growth of this town. Out there where T.C.U. is, I once woke up with over a foot of snow covering the ground, and I went to bed with the stars shining and not a cloud in sight. Had to push the snow away so's I could see out from my flop. Another thing, too, the winters used to be colder, and more water used to fall, rivers used to stay up for several weeks at a time, where to'ay they're hardly ever even up over a couple of feet.

"I guess I was a little over 15 when dad missed a few hoss from the range. He decided to take his hands and go west a few miles, and maybe discover some with his brand blotted into something else. Since that was a dangerous job to do, as it meant a killing any time you hung the deadwood on somebody for rustling. You'd either get killed, or you'll kill one. If you had the difference with you and you won the argument, the rustler would probably be naturalized, or made an honest citizen. Sort of the way they make good Indians out of Indians, only this was usually done with a rope whereas the other was just shoot them and let 'em lay.

"We got out past [Brackenridge?] a ways, and [?] and behold! We came to the edge of a wooded strip and there was about 15 head of buffalo grazing away as if nothing at all was wrong with that. I'd never even seen one before, because the Government had had them all killed out before I was even born.

"Moore literally had to hold me to keep me from barging 11 right out there and shooting all I could. The men talked around a little about this, thinking that maybe this was a private herd and maybe belonged to somebody, but they finally decided to bag all of them they could. Now, here's where the queer part of the thing comes in. My dad, a notoriously bad shot, always carried my grand-dad's old blunderbuss with him everywhere he went,

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instead of the regular guns carried by other cowpunchers. This old gun was a buffalo gun that grand-dad had used when everybody in the country was trying to see just how many head of buffalo they could shoot. The men decided to get together, and all work this gun who didn't have powerful rifles, and Brown rode through the timber to reach a draw that ended up just the other side of the herd.

"We all got ready, and when Brown showed up the way he done, the herd stampeded right towards us. Dad had him a rifle rest, and when one of them came in close enough, he got him. The rest of the herd stopped and went to milling around the one that was down, and dad got in three more good shots. [As?] a rule, a buffalo herd was supposed to mill like that 'til the last one was shoot, but this one didn't. They started running again, and away from the spot we were in. I gave my oldest boy the knife I used in skinning them critters. We took their hides, and a lot of meat, and then come on back home. We had meat for quite a while, although I can't say that I liked it better than the beef I'd been used to. The hides [?] made into overcoats and chaps. A buffalo hide will almost outlast a man because they're tougher than iron. 12 "I reckon I was around 16 when dad decided to sell out and go for some other range. He had a little over 1,500 head, and was having a little trouble over his whiskey making. It seemed to me like somebody didn't want him to make it, and was, fighting him over it. It wasn't the Government, but somebody. He'd made a lot of money in it, and there's still a few old-timers around Fort Worth who bought and drank his moonshine. I can round up 10 or 12 of them in a day's time.

"He sold out to Hart Brothers, who already had a ranch in Parker and just north of the Hood county line. They had over 4,000 head in their 'Heart' iron. You make it just like a heart. Buck Hart and Frank Hart were their names.

"The other ranchers around us were Jim Hart, who ran over 1,500 head in the 'U Heart' iron. You made a lazy heart, one that was laying down, and put the U inside it the same way to make his iron. He sold out the next year. Just cleaned up the stock and sold it to the Harts, then sold his land and iron to J.E. Estes, who ran a ranch north of [Lost?] Creek.

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"Jim Russell had a pretty good sized ranch, but he didn't run all beef. He run around 2,000 head of beef, 500 head of hosses, 800 hogs, 600 goats, and 400 sheep. His place was about a mile northwest of us, and on the Little Sunday Creek. The 'JR' was his iron.

"There was another ranch dad done some business with at times, but it was in [Palo?] [Pinto?] county. Jeff and [Don?] Cowden ran about 1,000 head in their 'JR' iron on that place. Dad bought from them, but they bought more from dad. They'd buy up enough 13 to make a drive, then they'd drive to Red River or to Fort Worth the same as we done.

"Then we moved, we located just south of [Gordon?], in Erath county. Dad established a stock farm there, and run the 12 head that he saved out of his 'OU Circle' to over 1,000 head in a few years. Of course, that 12 head didn't bring that many. I don't mean that a tall, but "a" bought with money he made from peddling his moonshine and money he made in his saloon he opened up in Gordon, right after he got the farm going. Another thing, any Maverick we [found?], we branded him right on the spot. Dad had sold his 'Circle OU' iron, so his new brand was just 'OU', without the overhead circle.

"Yep, seemed like dad was around likker all his life, and I don't believe I ever took over half a dozen shots in my life. I never did smoke, and the only time I ever tasted tobacco was when somebody had used the drinking cup just ahead of me. There were always some loose women around his saloon, but that never bothered me, either, and I was at an age then when they bother a fellow the most.

"Dad died about six years after he opened the saloon up. Died when I was 22 or 23. I guess I married my wife about seven months after he died. Her name was Rachel Rexroat, and we lived together about 30 years. She was the one who caused me to give up the range and come to Fort Worth, where I could get a job paying something. I went to work for the T.P R.R., and they sent me to Mingus. After around 35 years for the T.P. and other

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railroads, I got into other work around here, and now run this 14 rooming house here. I'm not much good for nothing else now, but that, I guess.